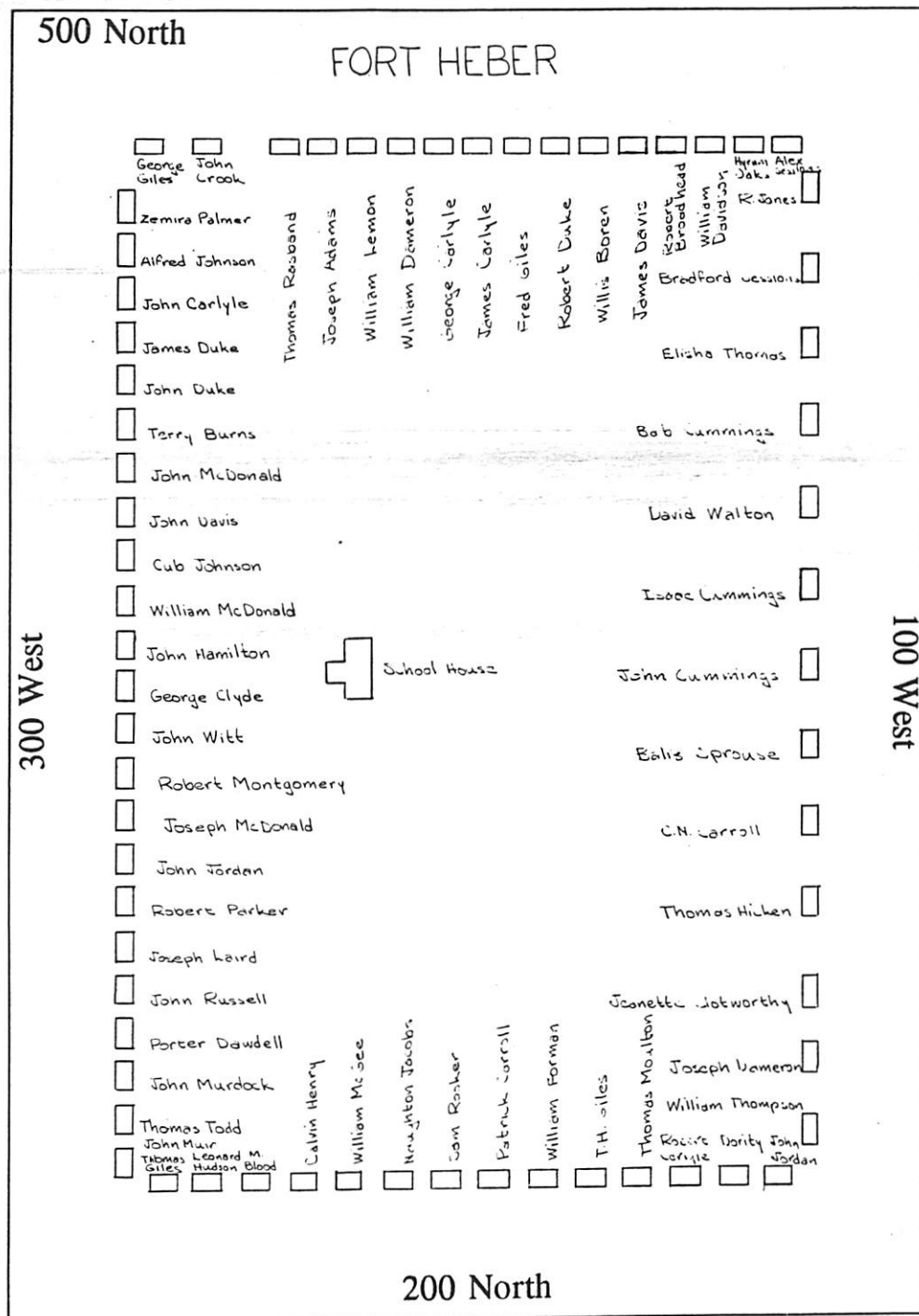


Pioneers
of
Fort Heber, Utah

*Fort
Pioneers*

- 1 Heber*
- 2 Midway*
- 3 Wallburg*

3-12-2000 rrg



Old Fort Heber showing the locations of the families who built their homes there in 1859.

The area for the fort was 80 rods square, lying between what is now First West and Third West Streets and 2nd North and 5th North Streets.

Within that fort area the company of men built their houses close together, with sufficient openings to let their stock in and out. The houses were built with green cottonwood logs that were cut on the river bottoms.

CHAPTER TWO

...And There Was Life in the Valley

Winter in the mountains and valleys of Deseret was a test of faith and stamina for the pioneer Saints. Snows and bitter, blowing winds came early and lasted long. In the high valleys of the Wasatch the frosts were heavy in September and snows were on the ground in October. Spring sunshine rarely melted the earth's snow crust until late March or April, leaving only about five summer months to prepare for cold, ice and snow all over again.

Anxieties about the weather were sharply accentuated for some 11 pioneer families in Utah Valley during the winter of 1858-59, for they were making plans to move into new homes high in the Wasatch mountains when Spring came.

The road through Provo Canyon had been finished before the snows fell and a bridge spanned the Provo River. With the decision made to move into the valley, they spent the short days and long, crisp winter nights in building furniture and making clothes. Plows had to be sharpened and harrows made ready for the sagebrush and soil of the new country. Wagons had to be repaired and those who lacked teams had to acquire them.

William Meeks was appointed leader of the group and they met frequently under his direction to ask the Lord to bless them in their preparations. Their constant prayer was that the elements would be tempered so they could mature crops and sustain themselves and their families in the new country.

Spring came late in 1859 and it was the last day of April before the group of 11 men with their three wagons and teams of oxen could leave Provo.

Families of the men had agreed to remain behind in Provo until log cabins could be built and other preparations made for their coming. Tearfully, the wives and children stood by that April morning as they watched their husbands and fathers start out toward Provo Canyon and a new life.

Facing the uncertainties of the venture were Thomas Rasband, John Crook, Charles N. Carroll, John Carlile, John Jordan, Henry Chatwin, Jesse Bond, James Carlile, William Giles Jr., William Carpenter and George Carlile.

Winter and the forces of nature had played havoc with the road in many places and traveling was slow. In addition, several snowslides blocked the route, making the journey hazardous as well as exhausting.

The only written record of the trip that has been preserved was in the journal of John Crook. He wrote:

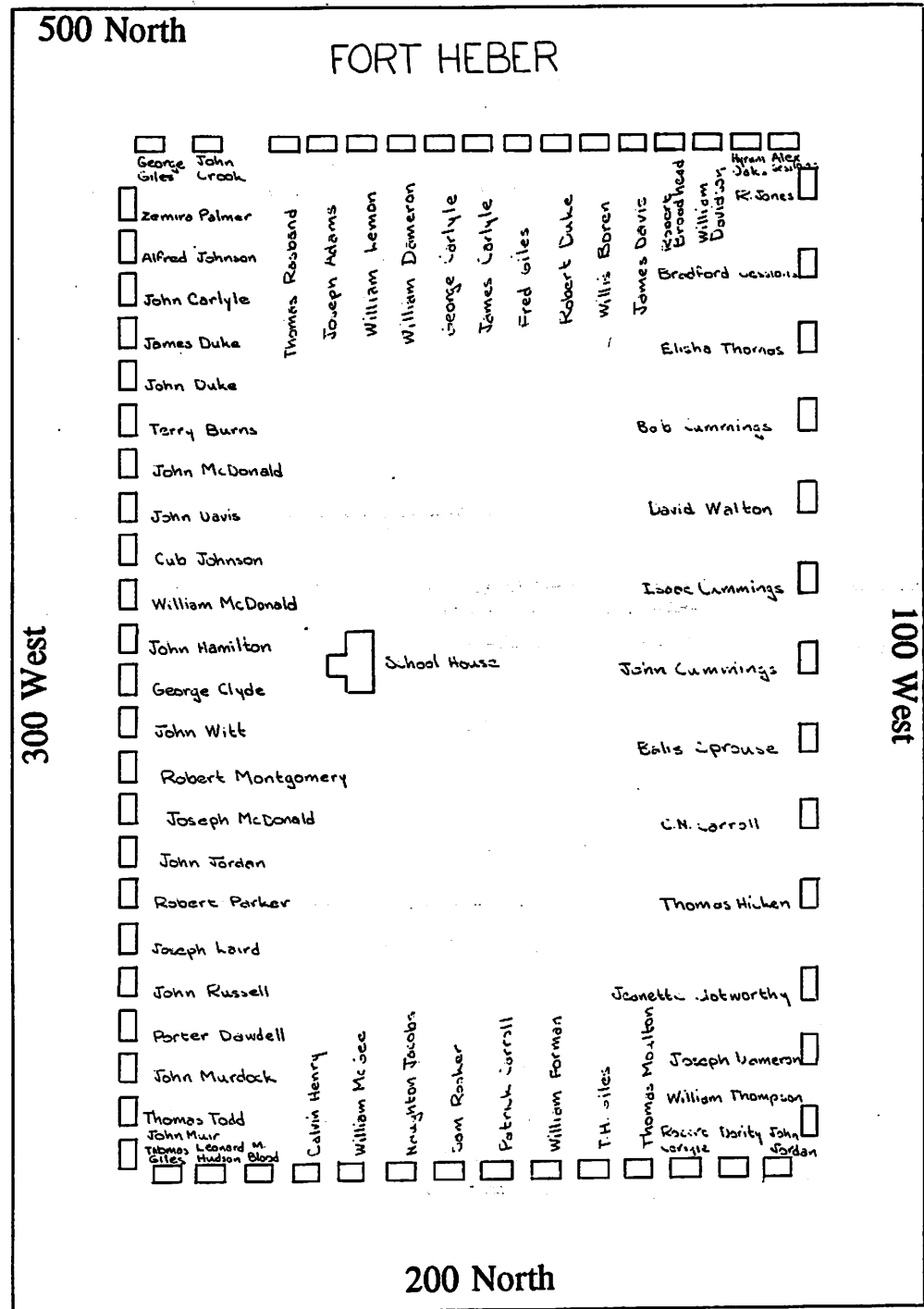
"April 30, 1859, we camped at a snowslide in Provo Canyon that night. The next morning we pulled our wagons to pieces and carried them to the top of the snowslide which was about a quarter of a mile wide. Our May Day excursion consisted of traveling on up the canyon from the snowslide to William Wall's ranch where we camped. The next day we crossed Daniels' Creek on the ice. There were heavy drifts of snow behind the willow bushes. We thought we were the first settlers to arrive in the valley that Spring, but when we reached the present site of Heber we saw two teams plowing north of us which proved to be William Davidson plowing with two yoke of oxen and Robert Broadhead and James Davis with a similar outfit between them. We found that William Davidson had his family here, which I believe was the first family in the valley."

Exchanging greetings with the men whom they found already in the valley, the group went on to a spring about a mile north of the present site of Heber. They made their camp here, as John Crook notes in his journal, because this was considered the best land in the valley. As their camp was the largest in the valley and most of them originally had come from Great Britain, they called it London. The spring by which they camped still retains that name.

The first order of business was for each man to claim his section of land, either 20 or 40 acres, and begin as quickly as possible to prepare the ground for planting. Much of the earth was covered with sagebrush, which proved very thick and hard to clear. Yet with a prayer in their hearts and a song of faith on their lips they cleared away the brush and planted not only the seeds of new crops but also the seeds of new homes and a new valley for themselves and those they loved.

As the crops were being planted the men camped in tents or in the wagons, but they soon spent some of their time in laying out a townsite and building log houses. They decided to build closer together in a fort so they could protect themselves from Indians if that became necessary. They selected the northwest corner of the townsite for the fort string of huts.

About the middle of June, 1859, Jesse Fuller, deputy county surveyor of Utah County, commenced a survey of the London townsite. The initial point was established at the north end of what is now Main Street. The first line was run along the west side of Main Street, the blocks being made 24 rods square and the streets five rods wide. Each block was divided into four lots, 12 rods square. A tract of eight blocks south and five and one-half blocks west of the initial point was laid off into blocks and lots forming a rectangle about three-fourths of a mile long and one-half mile wide. This formed the west half of the townsite. The east half was similarly laid off some months later, leaving Main Street seven rods wide.



Old Fort Heber showing the locations of the families who built their homes there in 1859.

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Within that fort area the company of men built their houses close together, with sufficient openings to let their stock in and out. The houses were built with green cottonwood logs that were cut on the river bottoms.

Dirt floors, dirt roofs and mud packed between the logs were the order of the day.

When the crops were planted and the log huts prepared, the men left the valley and went back to Provo where happy families greeted them with shouts of "How's the weather?" and "When are we going?"

With wives, children, cows, pigs, chickens and all their earthly possessions packed, the original company started out and were joined by others who were cheered by the reports of a good summer and plenty of farming land and irrigation water. Some of the additional families who came were Thomas H. Giles, John Giles, Hiram Oaks and George Carlile.

During that first summer, some 1,000 bushels of grain were raised in the valley. Though some of the wheat crop was injured by early frost, it could still be made into flour and the settlers rejoiced for the blessings of the harvest. Because the nearest gristmill was in Provo and a four-days' journey away, many of the people ground flour in small hand mills or boiled the wheat and ate it whole with milk.

With the crops in and summer on the wane, dread winter again loomed up before the people. Farming efforts had been to raise wheat and other crops to sustain human life, and so before winter came it was necessary to cut meadow hay and swamp grass for cattle wherever it could be found. All of it had to be cut by hand with a scythe, which proved to be the hardest work of the summer.

Many of the men who had come to the valley during the summer and raised their crops decided that they would return to Provo for the winter rather than provide hay for their cattle and be shut out from the rest of the world for the long winter months.

However, 18 families had cast their lot with Provo Valley and through the winter they stayed. These families, according to the journal of John Crook, were Thomas Rasband, John Crook, Charles N. Carroll, John Jordan, Alexander Sessions, Bradford Sessions, Hiram Oaks, John Lee, Richard Jones, James Davis, William Davidson, James Laird, John Sessions, Elisha Thomas, James Carlile and George Carlile. Jane Clotworthy and Elizabeth Carlile were both widows. Charles C. Thomas, unmarried, lived with his brother Elisha. No record is made of the exact number of women and children.

The first birth among the settlers in the valley occurred in November. The child, a daughter of William Davidson and his wife, Ellen, was named Timpanogos, the Indian name for the valley and the prominent mountain that lay at the west.

For those who remained, the first winter in the valley was a long and dreary one. The snow fell early and was several feet deep. For nearly four months they were without communication from the rest of the world.

At Christmas time, however, a group of young people from Provo braved the weather and came through the canyon by sleigh and spent the holiday season with the families in the valley. They soon left and no one else came into the valley until the snows melted.

Their being shut out from the rest of the world did not mean that the settlers spent the winter days and nights with long faces and twiddling thumbs. Quite the opposite. Meeting in the various log homes, they held Church meetings each Sabbath day and during the week gathered for singing, dancing and dramatics.

As the Spring of 1860 neared they hopefully looked for signs that winter was leaving and warm weather was on its way. By the end of March when the snow was still as deep as ever and no signs of Spring were evident, some began to get discouraged. It was finally determined that all would meet at the home of Thomas Rasband where a meeting would be held and the help of the Lord sought.

Those present reported that during the meeting they prayed sincerely and earnestly that the Lord would cause the snow to melt and Spring to come so that their famished oxen and cows might get grass to eat and that they could plant their crops and be in touch again with their friends in the lower valleys.

Before the meeting was dismissed there was water dripping from the eaves of the house and Spring was born in the valley.